

THE
Rational
SCEPTIST.

By a Person of Honour.



L O N D O N :
Printed for J. H. in the Year
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Rational SCEPTIST.

I.

UNLESS by Death, you never Knowledge
gain;
(For, to increase your Knowledge, you
must die:)
Tell me if all that Learning be not vain,
On which we Proudly in this Life rely?

II.

Is not the Learning which we Knowledge call,
Our own but by Opinion, and in Part?
Not made intirely Certain, nor to All;
And is not Knowledge but disputed Art?

A 3

III. And

III.

And tho' a Bad, yet 'tis a Forward Guide ;
 Who vexing at the shortness of the Day,
 Do's to o'ertake swift Time, still onward ride,
 Whilst we still Follow, and still Doubt our Way.

IV.

A Guide, who every step proceeds with Doubt,
 Who guessingly her Progress do's begin ;
 And brings us Back where first she led us Out,
 To meet Dark Midnight at her Restless Inn.

V.

It is a Plummert so short a Line,
 As sounds no deeper then the Sounder's Eyes ;
 The People's Meteor, which not long can Shine,
 Nor far above the Middle Region rise.

VI.

This Spy, from Schools gets ill Intelligence ;
 Where Art, imposing Rules, of't Gravely Errs ;
 She steals to Nature's Closet, and from thence
 Brings nought but Undecipher'd Characters.

VII.

She do's, like *Indie's* last Discoverers, boast
 Of Adding to Old Mapps ; tho' She has been
 But Sailing by some Clear and Open Coast,
 Where all is Woody, Wild, and Dark within.

VIII. False

VIII.

False Learning wanders Upward more and more :
 Knowledge (for such there is, in some degree)
 Still vainly, like the Eagle, loves to Soar ;
 Tho' it can never to the Highest see.

IX.

For Error's Mists do bound the Spirits sight, (low)
 As Clouds (which make Earth's Arched Roof seem
 Restrain the Bodies Eyes ; and still when Light
 Grows clearer upwards, Heav'n must higher show.

X.

And as good men, whose Minds towards Godhead rise,
 Take Heav'n's height higher then they can express ;
 So from that Height, they Lower Things despise,
 And of't contract Earth Littleness to Less :

XI.

Of this Forbidden Fruit, since we but gain
 A Taste, by which we only Hungry grow ;
 Wee meerly Toil, to find our Studies Vain,
 And trust to Schools, for what they cannot Know.

XII.

If Knowledge be the Coin of Souls, 'tis set
 Above the Standard of each Common Reign ;
 And like a Medal of GOD's Cabinet,
 Is seldom shown, and soon put up again,

XIII.

For tho' in one Blest Age much Sway it bears;
 Yet to the Next, it o't becomes Unknown;
 Unless, like long hid Metals, it appears
 In Counterfeits, and for Deceit be shown.

XIV.

If Heav'n with Knowledge did some One indue,
 With more than the Experience of the Dead;
 To teach the Living more, than Life e'er knew
 In Schools, where all Succession may be bred:

XV.

Then as in Court, meer Strangers bashfully
 At first their Walk toward private Doors begin;
 But bolder grow, when those they open spy,
 And being entred, beckon others in.

XVI.

So to his Studious Cell (which wou'd appear
 Like Nature's Privy Lodging) my Address
 I first by stealth wou'd make, but entring there,
 I shou'd grow Bold, and give to All access.

XVII.

Then to her Secret Nurs'ry wou'd proceed,
 And thither bring the World, to judg how She
 First Causes and Times Infancy did breed:
 For Knowledge shou'd, since Good, to All be free.

XVIII. If

XVIII.

If Knowledge must, as Evil, hidden lie;
Then We, it's Object (Nature) seem to blame;
And whilst we banish Knowledge as a Spy,
We but hide Nature, as we cover Shame:

XIX.

For if our Object (Nature) be Correct;
Bold Knowledge then a free Spectator is,
And not a Spy; since Spies we scarce Suspect;
Or Fear, but where their Objects are amiss.

XX.

In gathering Knowledge from the Sacred Tree,
I wou'd not Snatch in Haste the Fruit Below,
But rather Climb, like those who Curious be,
And Boldly Taste that which does Higher grow.

XXI.

For Knowledge wou'd her Prospect take in Height;
'Tis God's lov'd *EAGLET*, bred by him to Fly;
Tho' with Weak Eyes, still upward at the Light,
And may Soar short, but cannot Soar too high.

XXII.

Tho' Life, since Finite, has no ill Excuse,
For being but in Finite Objects Learn'd;
Yet sure the Soul was made for little Use,
Unless it be in Infinites Concern'd.

XXIII.

Speak then such things of Heav'n, since Studious Minds
 Seem Travailing, and your's Prepares to go,
 As mine may wish the Journey, when it finds
 That your's do's Heav'n, her Native Country, know.

XXIV.

Tell if you found your Faith, ere you it fought?
 Or cou'd it Spring ere Reason was full Blown?
 Or cou'd it Learn, till by your Reason Taught
 To know it self, or be by others known?

XXV.

When Men have several Faiths, to find the True,
 We only can the Aid of Reason use;
 'Tis Reason shews us which we shou'd Eschew,
 When by Comparison we learn to Chuse.

XXVI.

But thò we then on Reason must Rely,
 Where Men to several Faiths their Minds dispose,
 Yet, after Reason's Choice, the Schools are shy
 To let it judge the very Faith it Chose.

XXVII.

How e'er 'tis call'd to Construe the Records
 Of Faith's Dark Charter, wrapt in Sacred Writ;
 And is the only Judge even of those Words,
 By which Faith Claims that Reason shou'd submit.

XXVIII. Since

XXVIII.

Since Holy Text bids Faith to comprehend
Such Mysteries, as Nature may suspect ;
And Faith must Reason, as her Guide Attend,
Least She mistake what Scripture doth direct.

XXIX.

Since from the Souls far Courtry Heav'n, God sent
His Law, (an Embassy to few Reveal'd)
Which did those good Conditions Represent,
Of our Eternal Peace, e'er it was Seal'd:

XXX.

Since to Remote Embassadours are given
Interpreters, when they with Kings Confer ;
Since to that Law, God's Embassy from Heav'n,
Our Reason serves as an Interpreter :

XXXI.

Since Justly Clients Pay that Judge an Awe,
Who Laws lost Sence Interprets, and Restores ;
Yet Judges are no more above the Law,
Then Truchmen are above Embassadours :

XXXII.

Since Reason as a Judge, the Tryal hath
Of differing Faiths, by Adverse Pens Perplext ;
Why is not Reason reckon'd above Faith,
Tho' not above her Law, the Sacred Text ?

XXXIII.

If Reason has such Worth, why shou'd She still
 Attend Below, whilst Faith do's Upward Climb?
 Yet Common Faith seems but Unstudied Will;
 And Reason calls Unstudied Will a Crime.

XXXIV.

Slave Reason, ev'n at Home, in Prison lies !
 And by Religion is so Watch'd and Aw'd,
 That tho' the Prison Windows, both her Eyes,
 Stand open, yet she scarce dare's look Abroad.

XXXV.

Faith thinks that Reason is her Adverse Spy ;
 Yet Reason is thro' Doubtful Way her Guide ;
 But like a Scout brought in from th' Enemy, (Ride.
 Must, when She Guides her, Bound and Guarded

XXXVI.

Or if by Faith, not as her Judge, Disdain'd ;
 Nor, as her Guide, suspected ; She is found
 In every Sentence Just to the Arraign'd,
 And Guides her right, Unguarded and Unbound :

XXXVII.

Why then shou'd such a Judge be still deny'd
 T'Examine (since Faith's Claims still Publique are)
 Her Secret Pleas? Or, Why shou'd such a Guide
 Be hindred, where Faith goes, to go as far?

XXXVIII. And

XXXVIII.

And yet, as one Bred Humbly, who wou'd show
 His Monarch's Pallace to a Stranger, goes
 But to the Gates ; as if to let him know
 Where so much Greatness dwells, not what it do's ;

XXXIV.

Whilst strait the Stranger enters Uadeny'd,
 As one whose Breeding has much Bolder been ;
 So Reason, tho she were at first Faiths Guide
 To Heav'n, yet waits Without, when Faith goes In.

XL.

But, tho at Court Bold Strangers Enter, where
 The Way is to their Bashful Guide forbid ;
 Yet he, when they come back, is apt to Hear,
 And Ask them, what the King then said, and did.

XLI.

And so, tho Reason (which is first Faith's Guide
 To GOD) where Faith has always Entrance free,
 As Nature's Stranger ; tho 'tis then deny'd
 To Reason, as of Nature's Family.

XLII.

Yet strait, when from her Vision and her Trance,
 Faith do's Return, then Reason quits that Awe
 (Impos'd by Priests upon our Ignorance)
 And asks, *How much She of the Godhead saw ?*

XLIII.

But as a Prudent Monarch seems alone
Retir'd, as if Conceal'd ev'n to his Court ;
To Subjects more in Power then Person known ;
At Distance sought, and found but by Report ;

XLIV.

Yet, as Court-Strangers, getting some Access,
Are apt to tell at Home more then they saw ;
Tho' then, their Pencil draws Court-Greatness Less,
Then that which Truth at nearer View do's draw :

XLV.

So GOD hath Veil'd his Power with Mysteries,
Ev'n to his Court in Heav'n ; & Faith comes there,
Not Prying with a Strangers Curious Eyes,
But like a Plain Implicite Worshipper.

XLVI.

So Faith (which is ev'n taught an Ignorance,
For She by Knowledge quits her Dignity)
Do's lessen Godhead, which She wou'd Advance,
By telling more of GOD then She can see.

XLVII.

Our Souls, but like Unhappy Strangers, come (Coast ;
From Heav'n, their Country, to this World's bad
They Land, and strait are backward bound for home ;
And many are in Storms of Passion lost !

XLVIII. They

XLVIII.

They long with Danger Sail thro' Life's Vext Seas,
In Bodies, as in Vessels full of Leaks;
Walking in Veines, their Narrow Galleries,
Shorter then Walks of Seamen on the Decks.

XLIX.

Art's Card is by her Pilot Faith, Refus'd;
Her Course by Guess She ever forward bears;
Reason her Rudder is, but never Us'd, (Steers;
Because tow'rd Heav'n She ne'er with Reason

L.

For as a Pilot, sure of fair Trade Winds,
The Helm in all the Voyage never Hands,
But Ties it up; So Reason's Helm she binds,
And Boldly close for Heav'n's Safe Harbour stands:

LI.

In Reason's place Tradition do's her lead,
And that Presumptuous Antiquary makes
Strong Laws of Weak Opinions of the Dead;
And what was Common Coin, for Medals takes;

LII.

Tradition (Time's suspected Register)
Too of't Religion at her Tryal fails;
Instead of Knowledge, Teaches us to Err,
And wears out Truth's best Stories into Tales.

LIII.

O why has such a Guide Faith's Progress laid?
 Or can our Faith, ill Guided, Guide us well?
 Or had She not Tradition's Mapps Survey'd,
 How cou'd She aim to shew us Heav'n and Hell?

LIV.

If Faith with Reason never do's Advise;
 Nor yet Tradition leads her, She is then
 From Heav'n Inspir'd, and Secretly grows Wise
 Above the Schools, we know not How, nor When.

LV.

For cou'd we know how Faith's bold Trust is wrought,
 What are those Visions we in Sleep discern;
 And when by Heav'n's short Whispers we are Taught
 More than the Watchful Schools cou'd ever Learn:

LVI.

Then soon Faith's Ignorance, which now do's seem
 A Serious Wonder to Philosophy,
 Won'd fall from Value, to a Low Esteem,
 And not a Wonder; nor a Virtue be;

LVII.

But tho we cannot guess the Manner how
 Grace first is Secretly in small Seeds Sown;
 Yet Fruit, tho Seed lies hid, in View do's Grow;
 And Faith, the Fruit of Grace, must needs be known.

LVIII. Faith

LVIII.

Faith Lights us thro' the Dark to Deity,
Whilst without Sight we Witness that She shows ;
More GOD then in his Works, our Eyes can see ;
Tho' none but by those Works the Godhead knows :

LIX.

If You have Faith, then You we must Adore ;
Since Faith do's rather seem Inspir'd, then Taught ;
And Men Inspir'd, have of the Godhead more
Then Nature ever Found, or Reason Sought :

LX.

To You, whom Inspiration Sanctifies,
I come with Doubts, the Mind's Defect of Light ;
As to Apostles, some with Darkned Eyes,
Came to receive by Miracle their Sight :

LXI.

And when I thus Presume, you are with more
Then Nature's Publick Wealth ; by Faith Indu'd ;
Or think you shou'd Reveal your Secret Store ;
You cannot judge my Bold Opinion Rude.

LXII.

Ev'n Faith (not proving what it wou'd Assure)
But Bold Opinion seems to Reasons View ;
And since the Blind brought Faith to help their Cure,
I bring Opinion, Reason's Faith, to you.

LXIII.

We, for their Knowledge, Men Inspir'd Adore ;
 Not for thole Truths they hide, but those they show ;
 And Vulgar Reason finds, that none knows more
 Than that which he can make another know,

LXIV.

Then tell me first, If Nature must forbear
 To Ask, Why still She must remain in Doubt ?
 A Darkness, which do's much like Hell appear,
 Where all may Enter In, and none get Out.

LXV.

Thus we at once are Bidden and Forbid ;
 Charg'd to make *GOD* the Object of the Mind ;
 Then hindred from it, since He is so Hid,
 As we but Seek, that which we cannot Find :

LXVI.

Our Glimering Knowledge, like the Wandring Light
 In Feens, do's to Uncertainties Direct
 The Weary Progress of our Useless Sight,
 And only makes us Able to Suspect.

LXVII.

Or, if Inquiring Minds are not kept in,
 But by some few, whom Schools to Power Advance,
 Who, since Themselves see Short, wou'd make it Sin,
 When others look beyond their Ignorance :

LXVIII. If

LXVIII.

If as God's Students, we have leave to Learn
His Truths, why do's his Text oft need Debate ?
Why, as thro' Mists, must we his Law discern,
Since Laws seems Snares, when they are Intricate ?

LXIX.

They who believe Man's Reason is too scant ;
And that it do's the War of Writers cause ;
Infer that GOD's Great Works Proportion want,
Who Taught our Reason, & did Write those Laws.

LXX.

His Text, the Soul's Record, appears to some,
(Tho' thence our Souls hold their Inheritance)
Obscure by growing Old, and seems to come,
Not by Consignment to Us, but by Chance.

LXXI.

LAW (which is Reason made Authority)
Allows Consignment to be Good and Clear ;
Not when, like this, it does in Copies lie,
But in the known Original appear.

LXXII.

Could this Record be too Authentick made ?
Or why (when GOD was Fashion'd to our Eyes,
And very Forms of Humane Laws Obey'd)
Did He not Sign it, but by Deputies ?

LXXIII.

Or why, when he was Man, did he not Deign
 Wholly to Write this Text with his own Hand?
 Or why (as if all Written Rolls were Vain)
 Did he ne'er Write but Once, and but in Sand?

LXXIV.

Tell me why Heav'n at first did suffer Sin,
 Letting Seed Grow, which it had never Sown?
 Why, when the Soul's first Feaver did begin,
 Was it not Cur'd, which now a Plague is grown?

LXXV.

Why did not Heav'n's Prevention Sin Restrain?
 Or is not Power's Permission a Consent?
 Which is in Kings as much as to Ordain;
 And Ills Ordain'd are free from Punishment.

LXXVI.

And since no Crime cou'd be, ere Laws were Found;
 Laws Dearly Taught Us how to know Offence;
 Had Laws not been, we never had been Blam'd,
 For not to know we Sin, is Innocence.

LXXVII.

Since Child-hood was not Starv'd, but rather more
 Then finely Fed, so sweet were Pleasures made
 That Nourish'd it: For Sweet is Lust of Power,
 And Sweeter, Beauty, which hath Power betray'd.

LXXVIII. Sin

LXXVIII.

Sin, which at fullest Growth is Childish still,
Wou'd but for Pleasure's Company decay;
As Sickly Children Thrive, that have their Will;
But quickly Languish, being kept from Play.

LXXIX.

Since only Pleasure breeds Sin's Appetite;
Which still by Pleasant Objects is Infus'd;
Since 'tis Provok'd to what it do's Commit,
And Ills Provok'd, may Plead to be Excus'd:

LXXX.

Why shou'd our Sins, which not a Moment last,
(For, to Eternity compar'd, Extent
Of Life, is, ere we Name it, stopt and past;)
Receive a Doom of Endless Punishment?

LXXXI.

If Souls to Hell's Vast Prison never come,
Committed for their Crimes, but Destin'd be,
Like Bond-men Born, whose Prison is their Home,
And long ere they were Bound, cou'd not be Free:

LXXXII.

Then hard is Destiny's Dark Law, whose Text
We are forbid to Read, yet must Obey;
And Reason with her Useless Eyes is Vext,
Which strive to Guide her where they see no Way.

LXXXIII. Do's

LXXXIII.

Do's it our Reason's Mutinies Appease,
 To say, The Potter may his own Clay Mould
 To every Use, or in what Shape he Please,
 At first not Counsel'd, nor at last Controul'd?

LXXXIV.

Power's Hand can neither Ease be, nor Strict,
 To Lifeless Clay, which Ease nor Torment knows;
 And where it cannot Favour nor Afflict,
 It neither Justice nor Injustice shows.

LXXXV.

But Souls have Life, and Life Eternal too;
 Therefore if Doom'd before they can Offend,
 It seems to shew what Heav'nly Power Can Do;
 But do's not in that Deed that Power Commend,

LXXXVI.

That we are Destin'd after Death to more
 Then Reason thinks Due Punishment for Sins,
 Seems Possible; because in Life, before
 We know to Sin, our Punishment begins.

LXXXVII.

Why else do Infants, with Incessant Cries,
 Complain of Secret Harm as soon as Born?
 Or why are they, in Citie's Destinies,
 So oft by War from Ravish'd Mothers Torn?

LXXXVIII. Do's

LXXXVIII.

Do's not Belief of being Destin'd, draw
Our Reason to Presumption or Despair?
If Destiny be not (like Humane Law)
To be Repeal'd, what is the Use of Prayer?

LXXXIX.

Why ev'n to All was Pray'r Enjoyn'd, since those
Whom GOD (whose Will ne'er Alters) did Elect,
Are sure of Heav'n? And when we Pray, it shows
That we his Certainty of Will Suspect.

X C.

Those who to Lasting Darkness Destin'd were,
Tho' soon as Born they Pray, yet Pray too late;
Avoidless Ills we to no purpose Fear;
And None, when Fear is Past, will Supplicate.

F I N I S.